

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2021–22 BUDGET ESTIMATES



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2021**

**SESSION TWO
DEPARTMENT OF THE PREMIER AND CABINET**

**Members
Hon Peter Collier (Chair)
Hon Samantha Rowe (Deputy Chair)
Hon Jackie Jarvis
Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**

Hearing commenced at 2.00 pm**Hon SUE ELLERY****Leader of the House representing the Premier, examined:****Ms EMILY ROPER****Director General, examined:****Miss AMANDA PICKRELL****Deputy Director General, examined:****Mrs STEPHANIE BLACK****Deputy Director General, Infrastructure, Economy and State Services, examined:****Ms FIONA HUNT****Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy, examined:****Ms NADIA MIRAUDO****Deputy Director, COVID-19 Communications, examined:****Ms PHILIPPA REID****Acting Director, People and Governance Services, examined:****Mr ANDRE BRENDER-A-BRANDIS****Acting Chief Financial Officer, examined:****Mr GREG ITALIANO****Government Chief Information Officer, examined:**

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome to today's estimates hearing. To begin, the committee acknowledges and honours the traditional owners of the ancestral lands upon which we meet this afternoon, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pays its respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I ask each witnesses whether they have read, understood and signed a document titled, "Information for Witnesses"?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Your testimony before the committee must be complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The committee will place the uncorrected transcript of your evidence on the internet a few days after the hearing. When the transcript is finalised, the uncorrected version will be replaced by the finalised version. This is a public hearing, but the committee can elect to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

Members, before asking your question, I ask that you provide the relevant page and paragraph numbers. Would the minister like to make a brief opening statement?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No; I am good to go.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: I refer to page 92 of budget paper No 3 and the bottom section “National Agreement on Closing the Gap—Implementation Resourcing”. The budget papers note on page 92 —

The Department will spend \$3.6 million ... to resource the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in Western Australia.

Can you provide some further information as to what that funding will be used for?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The government is committed to finding a new way to work with Aboriginal people and organisations based on the four priority reforms that are set out in that National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Those reforms are around partnerships, shared decision-making, investing in the Aboriginal community-controlled sector and changing how government agencies work with Aboriginal people. The clear message from Aboriginal organisations is that these reforms are necessary for better outcomes and provide a foundation for specific initiatives that are directed to the 17 socio-economic targets in that national agreement.

In September this year, honourable member, we published two documents: *The Aboriginal empowerment strategy*, which sets out the whole-of-government direction for reforms, and the *Closing the gap jurisdictional implementation plan: Western Australia*. There is a specialist Closing the Gap team that has been established to work across government on implementation. We are also investing in the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, with \$3.4 million to the sector strengthening grants and \$1.4 million to the establishment of a peak body for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Across the budget, you will see more than \$374 million to programs and projects to make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal people. There are a couple in particular—one in my substantive portfolio around education, with \$10 million for upgrades to the Halls Creek District High School, and the Better Beginnings program will receive a further \$1 million, enabling expansion into the Kimberley and Pilbara. That is a project around increasing literacy and early learning. There is a whole list of things that we are doing, but that gives you a sense of it.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I refer to budget paper No 3, page 92. It is Gambling Harm Awareness Week and I note the spending associated with the royal commission into Crown. Evidently, these royal commissions are very expensive, because the budget paper indicates that some \$3.7 million has already been spent in the last financial year and a further \$5 million is to be expended in the current financial year. How does that quantum compare with other recent royal commissions in our state?

[2.10 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I would not have information comparing with previous royal commissions. I might be able to give you some more information about that \$3.7 million and the \$5 million, but I do not have information available to me here today on how that compares with previous royal commissions.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Can we take it on notice, then?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, I can ask the Premier if he is happy to do that. That would require someone to do a bit of work, because the information is not readily available, so I am not sure we are going to devote resources to that, but I am happy to ask the Premier if he will consider that.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The purpose of it, minister, is to ascertain—in total it looks like it is going to be \$8.7 million. Is that a fair and reasonable sum for a royal commission? I cannot make that judgement without the information.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That may well be the case, but, as I said, I am happy to give you an undertaking that I will ask the Premier if we can get that information. But like I said, it is not like going to the file and pulling that out. No-one, that I am aware of, has done that comparative work, so we would have to allocate resources to do that. Whether that is a huge job or not, I do not know. I can give you the undertaking that I can ask; I cannot give you an undertaking that I can easily provide that information for you.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Thank you very much. When was the director general first informed that this matter would change from an inquiry to a royal commission?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Again, honourable member, I do not have that information here; it is obviously not the kind of thing that is set out in the budget papers. If you want to ask a question about that, I suggest you do it through the normal processes of question time. I suspect, actually, because I provide the answers, that a question on that might have already been asked in the chamber. I am going to ask you to do it that way. That is not information that is held in a file which is about the budget papers.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Sorry, there may be some misunderstanding as to the nature of my question. I do not know who you thought I was asking about. I asked about the director general.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, and I am telling you that that is not information that is held in a file prepared for me about the budget papers. If you want to ask a question about that, I suggest you do that through the normal process of asking questions.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You do not have information at your disposal at the moment?

Hon SUE ELLERY: This is a session about the budget papers, and I am happy to assist in anything related to the budget papers. A question about who knew what when, about the particular timing of something, you can put through the normal process of asking questions.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: This is the normal question process. Minister, I draw to your attention—I appreciate that you are only acting in a representative capacity, but budget paper No 3 at page 92 indicates that the department is providing administrative support to the royal commission.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes. Honourable member, I do not have here the information that you are seeking. I do not think it is a reasonable question to ask in a budget session, so I am inviting you to put it on notice during the normal process of asking questions.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Did you want to take that on notice, member?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Not at this time, thank you, deputy chair. Minister, is it the case that the department is providing administrative support to the royal commission to the tune of \$3.7 million?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Correct.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: When was the director general first informed of or requested to provide that administrative support?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not sure that I would have that information here. If it assists you at all, the director general sitting with me at the table was not the director general at the time that the decision was made. I am not sure we are going to progress very far.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: That piece of information does assist substantially. The director general who is here—what role was the director general playing at that time when the department was requested to provide administrative support?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I will answer your questions about the budget, but the timing of who did what when is not related and is not available to me in the file. I cannot answer that question. I welcome and invite you to put it on notice through the normal process.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Did you want to put that on notice, member?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: No thank you, deputy chair. What was the role played by the director general immediately prior to taking on the current role?

Hon SUE ELLERY: What has that got to do with the budget papers, honourable member?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Presumably, the director general gets paid, and that gets paid by this particular department. I would like to know what role was played by this particular individual.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Intergovernmental relations and COVID in DPC.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In respect to that role, did it involve the provision of any information with respect to this matter being an inquiry or a royal commission?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: There were no conversations held by the now director general with respect to the selection of royal commissioners?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, is the department notified of the Premier's or any minister's visits or interactions with Crown?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is the Department of the Premier and Cabinet notified about his visits?

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Not just the Premier, but, yes, including the Premier and any of the ministers, any of their visits or interactions with Crown.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Not necessarily.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Have they been notified during the period of time that the royal commission has been underway and while they have been providing administrative support to the tune of \$3.7 million?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I will invite you to put that question on notice through the normal process of asking questions. That information is not available to me in a file prepared for the budget.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What I want to know is: is it the ordinary practice, while the royal commission is underway, for those providing the administrative support to be alerted of any visits or interactions by the Premier or his ministers with Crown?

Hon SUE ELLERY: What I am advised is that that money is actually for the royal commission. You will remember, when you first asked the question in this line of questioning, I said I was happy to provide you with a breakdown of how that \$3.7 million, for example, is being spent. That money is provided directly to the royal commission for them to do what they need to do—get legal advice. They have contractual arrangements with a range of organisations to provide them with support services. What the role of DPC is to ensure that the processes related to cabinet, as they might relate to the royal commission, are handled appropriately, but more than that, that money is spent by the royal commission itself.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So the department is not providing administrative support to the commission?

Hon SUE ELLERY: To the extent of any interface that is required between the royal commission and cabinet in the department's normal role in providing a service to cabinet.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What is the cost of that support?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It might help you, honourable member. Some of that money, for example, across 2020–21 and 2021–22, a total of \$4.686 million is allocated and the royal commission uses that to contract for services, including—this might help you, honourable member—legal counsel; including the provision of IT services; including Law In Order, a legal services provider of end-to-end document and digital solutions including e-hearing capability, and LexisNexis, provider of legal solutions and analytics. The role of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is paying the invoices for those things, but that money is spent by the royal commission on the things that the royal commission needs to do to carry out its work.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, who was the director general at the time that the royal commission was announced?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Rebecca Brown.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, if I could take you to budget paper No 2, volume 1, which is, funnily enough, the Premier and Cabinet section. I will take you to page 58. I have a range of questions around these sections. I will start with the chart of spending changes at the top of page 58. About midway down in the “Other” section—it is alphabetical—is “Ministerial Officers and Oversight of Parliamentary Electorate Offices”. There is \$3.5 million effectively there every year for the current budget year and the out years. There was none for the year before. I am interested to know precisely what this budget item is and what does it deliver. What does it deliver that was not required in previous financial years?

[2.20 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: We will spend \$13.9 million over the budget year in the forward estimates: \$2.4 million, and \$9.7 million in total to meet existing expenses related to employing ministerial officers; \$600 000, a total of \$2.4 million over the out years, to meet existing expenses related to overseeing parliamentary electorate offices; \$360 000 per annum, or \$1.8 million in total, to fund four additional FTE to administer parliamentary travel allowances and other entitlements and to support governance, education, training and integrity issues.

The last part of your question was: what is being paid for now that perhaps was not being paid for before? Of the first two numbers that I gave the honourable member, \$2.4 million to meet existing expenses and \$600 000—the first one is for ministerial officers and the second is for parliamentary electorate offices. I am advised that with respect to parliamentary electorate offices, there was a shortfall in the cost of overseeing parliamentary electorate offices of \$600 000 per annum; and in respect to the ministerial officers, the budget allocation provides for approximately \$2.4 million per year to address existing ministerial office structural funding deficits. It is not about additional FTE. I am advised that across both governments, there was a structural funding deficit in funding these two things. This budget addresses that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Through you, chair. Thank you, but it does not really explain exactly what it gets spent on. So four-fifths is going to ministerial officers—not wages, thank you—but as far as we know that could be extra biscuits and a nicer brand of tea; we do not know exactly what it is actually being spent on.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is FTE. What I said in the last bit when I was talking about the structural funding deficit is that it is not additional FTE, it is to meet existing FTE. I am advised that over the course of the previous government and the first term of this government, there was a structural deficit in that there was not enough money built into this part of the budget to pay those costs. This budget addresses that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: So, in previous budgets, we would have found a catch-up of \$3.5 million somehow in the expenditure. How do we go back and find that equivalency?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised the department was just running a deficit in respect of that, so there were not the funds to meet those costs. There is not additional FTE that are being paid for out of this. This is addressing that deficit that existed before.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Do we know precisely how far back that goes or is that an estimate?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised no-one here is able to tell me beyond the last term of this government and the last term of the previous Liberal–National government.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There are a number of places we could reference this, but let us jump to page 67. In between income statements and controlled grants and subsidies, there are four bits of additional information. Paragraph (b) is the full-time equivalents, effectively, for Premier and Cabinet. It talks about the actual in 2019–20 of 732 and the estimate for the current financial year of 808. You will be pleased to know, minister, I have been through all those numbers in detail and they all add up in the budget papers.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Good to know.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is very pleasing. Can I just check, because according to the numbers in the book, both refer to the first five service areas and in each one they have an FTE equivalent there. The budget papers demonstrate that, effectively, over three years, there have been 125 additional FTEs applied to Premier and Cabinet and, of those, if you look at the various parts, in particular at page 62 under “Government Policy Management—Whole-of-Government”, you have gone in 2019–20 from 117 to 149 FTEs in the whole-of-government policy management. In fact, if you go back to the previous year, you have had an increase of 67. So, over three years, you have gone from 82 to 149 FTEs in that particular section. Whereas, interestingly, at the same time, administration of parliamentary support has gone backwards by 26 FTEs. That is incredibly interesting. Could you give us a reason why there is a significant increase in the FTEs in this department, particularly because in relation to service 3, whole of government, given that the administration of executive government is an entirely separate —

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, just remind me what page service 3 appears on?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Service 3 is on page 62 and on the bottom of that is “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)”. The target budget is 149. That is a 67 FTE increase over three years. Could we have and reason for that significant increase?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised that it is primarily COVID and that it is finite, as in it is not going to be ongoing. I will see if I can find you some more information.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That was going to be one of my further questions: how long-term that is.

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will get the director general to provide some more information.

Ms ROPER: The FTE movement from 109 to 122 from 2020–21 to the actual—there was an increase of 13 FTE to the out term of 122 at the end of the financial year. This is related to COVID. There were five FTE for COVID coordination, three for COVID comms and three for intergovernmental relations in support of national cabinet. Then in the FTE movement from 122 to 149 from the 2021–22 estimated to the budget target for 2021–22, these increases relate again to COVID. So, there is no actual real increase in FTE in the department. In the previous year we were relying on placements to support the COVID efforts, but as COVID endured, agencies, of course, wanted their people back, so we have had budgeted this financial year—it is only a year’s funding—for FTE for the COVID response, both from a communications and coordination perspective.

Hon SUE ELLERY: If it is of any assistance to the honourable member, when COVID first began, agencies were asked to pull people from across all agencies together so that we had the capacity to deal with what was effectively building a plane as we were flying a plane, as some people have described it. Obviously, as that has settled but the issue has continued, additional FTE have been added.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Through the minister, when those sorts of people were brought in for a COVID response, were their salaries being paid by DPC or by the original agencies?

Hon SUE ELLERY: By the original agencies.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Then, as they have taken those back, have DPC put on an equivalent number of staff?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The answer is yes.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Do we know how many of those staff are on a limited fixed-term contract versus how many are permanent employees?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised that we do not have the actual number here, but the majority of them are on fixed, so it is a finite spend.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Have we any idea what the majority, then, of those fixed contracts—what time frame are we looking at?

Hon SUE ELLERY: One year.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: So they are rolling one-year contracts, potentially. Can the minister indicate why there has been an ability to reduce—still on page 62—at the top of page there has been effectively no increase in FTEs. The vast majority of these FTE are electorate office staff. There has been no significant increase in that, but I note that the numbers were higher previously. So in 2018–19, there were 245 FTE in that category; it has dropped down to 219 at a time when others have increased. Is there any reason, at a time when you have more FTE going into policy delivery, why there might have been an impact on services to Parliament?

[2.30 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: There has been no increase in the number of FTE that MPs are entitled to employ, so that number has not changed. Whether or not there has been a decrease in the number of FTE employed to assist—so FTE based physically in DPC to assist members of Parliament—I am just going to check and I will find out. Now, I am going to ask one of the officers with a double-barrelled name—I am going to get it right; I promise you—Mr Brender-A-Brandis, to provide you with an answer.

Mr BENDER-A-BRANDIS: Thank you very much, minister. Thank you, member, for the question. With regard to the FTE that are attributed to the services, they are also weighted for an allocation of the internal overhead staff that actually assist supporting the five services that we have. So, dependent on the total cost of services for each of those services, the allocation of the overhead costs but also the overhead staff to allocate to identify the actual KPI comes into play as well. So in the earlier years, you might very well have had a larger total cost of services and, for that reason, it would also drive higher allocation of the overhead cost and also the overhead service. It does make it slightly complicated when you are looking at FTEs for any of the services to bear in mind that we actually have to allocate the overhead as well to get a true service allocation cost and FTE. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon Dr Steve Thomas, do you maybe want to do one more question and then we will —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: And then pass it on?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Pass on.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Okay, so I will do a last one. Minister, on page 58 under “Spending Changes”, the first line item is “Workforce Campaign”. I presume that is the advertising campaign for bringing Labor in. Have you got a breakdown of that into precisely where that money has gone? How much has gone into advertising versus administration versus other outcomes?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The campaign will be launched later this year. The money that has been allocated includes two additional FTE within the COVID-19 comms team, but the rest is actually for the cost of the campaign. The campaign will run over a 12-month period. It has been developed and managed by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in consultation with one of my agencies, the Department of Training and Workforce Development, and the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. There has already been extensive consultation about what the campaign strategy should look like in collaboration with industry representatives including the BGC Housing Group, the Housing Industry Association, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, the Utilities, Engineering, Electrical and Automotive Training Council and the Master Builders Association of WA. As at 28 September, one of those additional FTE has been employed. The launch date is expected to be later this year and the campaign will run for a year.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Minister, does the Department of the Premier and Cabinet play any role in the delivery of the government’s election commitment for an additional public holiday in Western Australia?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Do you want to take me to a point in the budget paper?

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Well, I cannot find it in the budget paper, so can you answer my question?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Then I am probably not going to be in a position to give you an answer, but I will just check. The answer is no.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Okay, thanks. I put some questions on notice prior to the hearing. Question 1 is in relation to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform. I did ask at (b) —

What was the hourly rate and total cost of each committee member?

I do not believe that the second part of my question has been answered. I have been given some daily or half-daily rates, but are you in a position to answer that question that I have given notice of, which is the total cost of each committee member?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not have any information here, honourable member. But if you would like me to pursue it, I am advised that we can take that on notice and see if we have got that information available. We can take it on notice. You might not get it within the time frame because I am advised that not all invoices are in, so we will do our best. We just might not make it within that time frame. [*Supplementary Information No B2.*]

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: And just on that issue that not all the invoices are in, I notice from the answer that some members of the committee have refused payment—some have asked their respective universities to invoice the government. Can you elaborate on that arrangement? I would have thought if it was an individual providing services to the ministerial expert—I mean, the first thing is, I would have thought this would have been settled before their engagement, but, secondly, is it now the universities that are providing services to the state of Western Australia with respect to electoral reform? That, to me, sounds like a very unusual arrangement.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I am not sure that I can take it much further. The advice that I have is that we do not know the reasons why the two people asked that the funds be directed to

their university. I also asked if it was unusual and I am told that we do not know if it is that unusual, so there may well be arrangements made between other departments and individuals from time to time that DPC would not be aware of. So, I am not sure that I can take it much beyond that.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Can you tell me who the two individuals are that are requesting universities invoice the state on their behalf?

Hon SUE ELLERY: The department is saying that I probably need to check privacy issues, but if they are okay, then I can give an undertaking to ask if that information can be provided.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Honourable member, would you like that on notice?

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Actually, I do not think it is required because the answer that I have been provided is that all three of them have requested their universities invoice and that the state is waiting on two of the universities to invoice, so I do not think that that is an issue, so that is not required.

There were five meetings of the ministerial expert committee ranging between two and five hours. Did all committee members attend all meetings?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, the DPC would not have that information here and I am not sure that DPC would even hold that information.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Well, I think they would hold that information because of the fee-charging structure. That is been answered in 1(b), which relates to daily, half-daily and hourly rates of those members. So I would think some accurate records, given the department is providing secretariat support, would have been kept.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, given we are still waiting for two invoices, I can give you an undertaking that I can ask if that information is available. Because we are still waiting for those two invoices, I cannot guarantee that I can meet the time line required by the estimates committee. So if you do not mind that, I can give you an undertaking that I will ask if that is available.

[2.40 pm]

[*Supplementary Information No B3.*]

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: In the last Parliament, there were requests made by non-government members, who were not necessarily members of the opposition, for additional resourcing and funding. In this new Parliament, have such requests been made and what, if any, have been granted?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not know that that would be listed in the budget papers. I understand that one request from each of them, or one request on behalf of all of them, has been made and that the response to that was “not at this stage”.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Just to follow-up to that: on what basis was it deemed justifiable in the last Parliament that non-government members ought to be given a level of resourcing to discharge their duty, but not in this Parliament?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I do not have that information available here, honourable member.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Do any of the advisers have that information available?

Hon SUE ELLERY: They would not have that information here either. I know what is in the file and that information is not available here.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Question 2 of questions prior to hearings related to \$13.9 million in spending changes, which I think has been touched on by previous members today. With respect to the \$1.8 million required to meet the cost of one FTE for the administration of the parliamentary travel allowance and three FTE to support the governance education and training in integrity issues

relating to the PTA and other entitlements, is this extra resourcing to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to discharge its role with respect to the parliamentary travel allowance set by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised yes.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I refer the minister to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 62, specifically to the line item halfway down that first chart, “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)”. I think it has been mentioned here by a previous speaker and also by Hon Martin Aldridge next door. Am I right in thinking—I think I am—that this item here, “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)”, refers to the parliamentary electoral office staff? Assuming that I am right, I am interested in knowing, as the staff members have been cut from the last Parliament, what savings have actually been made by reducing the number of FTEs to the crossbench?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am not sure that it is accurate to say the numbers have been cut. If you were listening to the explanation provided a little bit earlier, there was information given about the weighting attached to these numbers. This would be my non-technical take on it: they are not actual people. There is a weighting attached to those numbers, which was explained previously. Having said that, I will see if there is further information that I can give you.

I will get the explanation again and see if that provides you with what you want.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Very good. Mine are non-technical too because the numbers, at least in my office, have gone from three to two, which is actually a reduction.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is a choice for you to make, honourable member. Your entitlement remains the same as a member of Parliament. If you are talking about the difference that Hon Martin Aldridge asked about an arrangement that was in place between some non-government members and the government in the last term, that would explain the difference, but your entitlement as a member of Parliament is the same as everybody else’s entitlement as a member of Parliament.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: I do appreciate that, but to be clear, the Premier was quite happy to spend an uncertain amount of money, which has not been disclosed to me, on providing support to right-aligned parties like One Nation; the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; and the Lib Dems in the last Parliament, but less comfortable offering that same facility to the Legalise Cannabis WA Party and the Greens who might better be aligned with the Premier’s message. I am just wondering if that is a confirmation. Can I assume that this is the intent of the DPC—to give more direction to the right wing and less to the left?

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is a gorgeous question; I love the question! No, that would not be a decision of DPC. That would not, in fact, be a decision of government. It is not about the political leaning of the respective parties. If you want to draw that conclusion, I think you would be in error. In any event, my recollection of the response, not from DPC but from the Premier, to the request, was “not at this stage”.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Just a follow-up question. I would hope this could be put to the Premier again. It might be advisable, in view of the work that we have to do, that it might be a good idea to add a little bit of support, bearing in mind that the overall budget looked at \$3.4 million, and a little bit more for those few of us on the crossbench would not go that far amiss.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Noted, honourable member.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 58, under “Spending Changes”. About a third of the way down is “Digital Capability Fund Administration”. I understand that

expenditure is in relation to the \$500 million digital capability fund. Are you able to outline a bit more about what the aim of the digital capability fund is and why it has been established?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you, honourable member. Digital transformation is a key enabler for greater capacity for government to provide better quality services to those who interact with government, be they individual citizens or businesses. COVID-19, amongst other things, has really demonstrated the importance of government having contemporary digital and data capabilities. The purpose of this fund is to make sure that government agencies are best able to deliver what they need to, digitally. It is about accelerating government digital service reform to improve outcomes; enabling more strategic and targeted investment in digital transformation across government; giving government clear visibility about the quantum and the quality of the digital investments that are being made; supporting government agencies to give effect to the digital strategy 2021–25; to achieve a coordinated and collaborative approach to developing digital capabilities; to integrate and streamline services and reduce duplication, where it is necessary; to support upgrades to what is cutely referred to as “legacy” ICT systems that present significant risk to service delivery; and to enable greater oversight and assurance. Prior to the establishment of this fund, there had been no central oversight of ICT investment across the public sector. As a consequence of that, we have seen some duplication and waste. The creation of the fund has given the Office of Digital Government greater oversight of that investment. Digital Government administer the fund in collaboration with Treasury and it is a significant investment in ensuring government can continue to best serve the people of Western Australia.

Hon SANDRA CARR: I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 58, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, under the subheading “Cyber Security”. My question is: I note the Office of Digital Government is leading and coordinating the government’s cybersecurity efforts. Can you please provide more detail on the work that is being done to respond to cyberthreats?”

[2.50 pm]

Hon SUE ELLERY: Thank you, honourable member. It is the case that cyberthreats are continuing to increase both in frequency and sophistication. The past year has seen malicious actors target the private sector, government institutions and critical infrastructure, both nationally and internationally. Those attacks can come from nation states; sophisticated cybercriminal groups, as seen by recent attacks on Microsoft Exchange email servers; IT management supply chains; and ransomware events across multiple industries.

The cybersecurity unit within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet coordinates and supports improvements to cybersecurity resilience; improves visibility of cybersecurity threats, vulnerabilities and controls across the government sector; coordinates interagency operational responses to cybersecurity incidents; leads the state’s interjurisdictional cybersecurity engagement; and provides cybersecurity advice to government. Digital Government provides agencies with advice and technical assistance, and facilitates access to resources for agencies to better secure their ICT environments. The whole-of-government security operations centre, which was announced in September last year, became operational on 1 July this year. That centre is now providing security monitoring agencies to assist them in detecting and responding to cyber threats. A SOC is capable of monitoring in real time all agencies that have implemented the WA government’s default security information and event management platform, and have enabled access to their environments for the SOC to do so. Government has identified cybersecurity as one of the four digital transformation priorities in the digital strategy.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Minister, you provided an answer to me just a moment ago in relation to the \$1.8 million that will employ four FTEs in the department to administer and govern the

parliamentary travel allowance over the budget and forward estimates. I have had a chance to look at the parliamentary travel allowance, and I understand that each member of Parliament is entitled to \$27 000 per parliamentary term, so on the basis that every member spends every dollar, which would not be the case, that is some \$2.565 million in expenditure. Am I correct in looking at this expenditure that the department is going to spend \$1.8 million administering \$2.5 million?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, they do not just administer the travel. There are other elements. The short answer to your question is no. That \$1.8 million is not just to be spent on the travel allowance; it is on a range of things like education and training, governance and those sorts of things. That \$1.8 million across the four years is made up of \$360 000 a year for four additional FTEs to administer the parliamentary travel allowances and other entitlements, and to support governance, education training and integrity issues. So it is not just about administering the travel allowance.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Okay, that is good to hear, because it seemed quite extraordinary if we were spending that amount of money to administer that amount of money. The parliamentary travel allowance has obviously been identified. What are the other entitlements that these four FTEs will provide governance, integrity and education services to?

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is the electorate allowance, air charter, officeholders, accommodation, parliamentary travel and study allowance, officeholder vehicles, and then providing assistance to members on any elements of those around governance and the like.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: In budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 59 it lists the six services delivered by the department. The first of those is the administration of executive government services. Does that include the management of the ministerial code of conduct?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, honourable member. That is done as part of the function of cabinet services.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What about the ministerial gift register?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I am advised that that is administered by each individual ministerial office.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So in the case of the Premier, does the department deal with the Premier's list of gifts?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, it would be his ministerial office.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So the department does not retain documents pertaining to the ministerial gift register?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Correct, it does not.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: With respect to the Ministerial Code of Conduct, what documents does the department retain in respect to the management of that code?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Cabinet services would, for example, hold anything that was noted in the minutes of a cabinet meeting about a declaration of a potential conflict of interest.

[3.00 pm]

Hon NICK GOIRAN: I am looking for an exhaustive list of documents that are retained by the department in respect of the Ministerial Code of Conduct. What has been provided there appears to be one example.

Hon SUE ELLERY: There is the code itself.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Yes.

Hon SUE ELLERY: In terms of other documents, I do not know that I can give you that. The 2021 code has been updated to incorporate additional information and direction in relation to managing

conflicts of interest, disclosing pecuniary interests, divesting conflicting positions, declaring personal and business relationships, defining gifts and hospitality and managing their reporting, changes to the Corruption and Crime Commission and Public Sector Commission management of public sector misconduct, the passage of the Integrity (Lobbyists) Act 2016, enhanced reporting of overseas travel to Parliament, and clarity in relation to the use of frequent flyer points. So, if there were documents with respect to those things, cabinet services would have those.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: You will need to take this on notice, no doubt, minister. Can a list of those documents be provided to the committee as they were created in the last 12 months?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I can ask, honourable member. I am not the Premier, so I can ask the Premier if he is okay with that information, if it exists, to be provided.

[Supplementary Information No B4.]

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Noting the time —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: There are further questions.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: We are finishing at three.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: No problem—a quick question then, chair. In budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 67, there is a line item there under the heading “Other Expenses”. It refers to the DPC annual report, stating \$123 050 was spent on market research organisations. What issues does this market research pertain to?

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable member, I am advised that the department has commissioned some research into vaccine hesitancy—what people are identifying as the reasons for their hesitancy.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, member; noting the time, the hearing has finished at three.

I thank you all for your attendance today. Members, you can still submit your remaining questions through the electronic lodgement system, which will close at 5.00 pm on 29 October 2021. Witnesses, the committee will forward the uncorrected transcript of evidence with questions taken on notice highlighted as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm on 17 November 2021. Should you be able to unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons why the due date cannot be met. Once again, I thank you for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 3.04 pm
